

5. Alternatives Evaluation

This chapter includes a detailed evaluation and comparison of the three land use and circulation alternatives and their differing potential outcomes on:

- Urban Form
- Traffic and Multimodal Circulation
- Community Services
- Utilities
- Environmental Sustainability
- Equity And Public Health
- Fiscal Sustainability
- Market Feasibility
- Community Benefits

Each section also lists potential **Policy Considerations**. Future development in San Mateo will be influenced by the land uses allowed in the General Plan and will also be strongly influenced by the policies in the General Plan. The policy considerations offered here will be subject to community discussion and debate as the General Plan is drafted and reviewed before adoption.

5.1 URBAN FORM

HEIGHT AND DENSITY

The City of San Mateo's Zoning Code regulates the height and density of buildings citywide. Maximum building height standards are set forth on the Building Height Plan of the General Plan. Additionally, the City's Downtown Specific Plan and Bay Meadows Specific Plan define height and density standards for the areas encompassed by these specific plans.

San Mateo is largely “built-out,” meaning there are relatively few vacant parcels within the city limit. In order to accommodate the State required housing numbers (RHNA) and anticipated job growth, some limited areas of the city will need to redevelop at a higher intensity. This could be achieved through increased densities and/or higher building heights. The alternatives are based on community input and consider potential land use changes, using the new land use typologies, that reflect a range of allowed heights and densities for all types of development. The alternatives do not assume or propose any specific buildings or development projects, and no decisions have been made about future heights on individual parcels.

In November 2020, San Mateo voters approved Measure Y, which extended past voter-approved limits on new residential building heights and densities to be no more than 50 dwelling units per acre and 55 feet in height with some exceptions, including development within the Hillsdale Shopping Center (Study Area 10) and some specific areas of Downtown (Study Area 4) where building heights of up to 60 feet and 75 feet may be allowed, respectively. The range of land use categories used in the alternatives would maintain existing height limits in some areas, but the land use categories Residential Medium, Residential High, Mixed-Use Medium, Mixed-Use High, Office Medium, and Office High would allow buildings with six or more stories, which exceed Measure Y's prescribed building height and/or density limits. Residential Medium, Office Medium, and Mixed-Use Medium, which allow a range of 4 to 7 stories in building height. Buildings of 4 to 5 stories under these “Medium” land use designations would generally be allowed under Measure Y, but buildings exceeding 5 stories would not be aligned with the measure.

Among the three alternatives, Alternative C shows the most areas of change with the highest intensities (density and building height) throughout the study areas, including Mixed-Use Medium along the southern end of El Camino Real (Study Area 2), Mixed-Use High uses along El Camino Real around the Hillsdale station (Study Area 3), and in Downtown (Study Area 4) with Residential High uses along Railroad

Avenue and Mixed-Use High uses between Baldwin Avenue and 5th Avenue. Buildings in the Residential High designation could be 8 or more stories tall. At the same time, Alternative C also maintains the most areas that are in alignment with Measure Y, including the Mixed-Use Low uses along Peninsula Avenue and the Residential Low uses in Study Areas 4 and 8. Alternative C focuses its highest density uses in concentrated nodes throughout the study areas, while Alternatives A and B have greater distribution of Medium density uses throughout the study areas.

Overall, Alternative A has the least High-density designations compared to Alternatives B and C, and also preserves several areas consistent with Measure Y, including Mixed-use Medium in Downtown (Study Area 4) between Baldwin Avenue and 3rd Avenue and Mixed-Use Low along El Camino Real near the Hillsdale station (Study Area 3).

Alternative B has more High density-designations than Alternative A, but less than Alternative C, including Residential High uses along El Camino Real between 12th Avenue and 16th Avenue (Study Area 1 Central). In contrast, Alternatives A and C propose primarily Mixed-Use Medium in this area.

Most of the study areas are bordered by existing single-family residential neighborhoods with homes typically 1 to 2 stories high. Since Mixed-Use, Residential, and Office uses at Medium and High densities would potentially be 4 to 7 stories (Medium) and more than 8 stories tall (High), new development at these proposed heights would affect the visual character of neighborhoods adjacent to these higher density nodes and could cast shadows during certain parts of the day onto nearby single-family residences. This would occur in all Alternatives, but Alternatives B and C have the most Medium and High density designations that abut single-family neighborhoods. Alternative C has the greatest amount of High density development next to single-family neighborhoods in Study Areas 3 and 4, particularly around the Hayward Park and future Hillsdale

transit stations. In Alternative B, there are areas with High density development near single-family residences along El Camino Real in Study Area 1 and around the future Hillsdale transit station in Study Area 3.

Land use changes proposed within Study Areas 6, 9, and 10 have less of an impact on existing single-family residences as these study areas are more geographically isolated, adjacent to wider roadways, or are buffered from single-family residential neighborhoods by other uses.

ABILITY TO MEET FUTURE RHNA

As described in Section 4.4., State law requires every California jurisdiction to plan for its “fair share” of the regional housing need for households of all income levels. San Mateo’s 6th Cycle RHNA is 7,015 housing units, distributed among four income categories that range from Very Low Income to Above Moderate Income. The City must ensure it can accommodate the new housing units that might be built for the period from 2023 to 2031.

Although the RHNA allocation is not a requirement to build units, the State legislature has enacted increasingly stringent requirements on cities to ensure they are doing everything possible for housing to be built and to remove common barriers to housing construction. Working under this assumption, all three alternatives have been developed to include enough housing sites to fulfill the city’s anticipated RHNA 6th Cycle numbers. However, the General Plan extends beyond the 6th Cycle. Assuming continued 8-year RHNA cycles, and that the General Plan’s expected life cycle is until 2040, the updated General Plan should designate sufficient residential land to accommodate the future 7th Cycle (January 2031 to January 2039) and early 8th Cycle (January 2039 to January 2047).

The scale of future housing allocations is unknown and difficult to predict. If the 7th Cycle RHNA is in the same proportion to the existing number of homes as the 6th Cycle RHNA, it would call for 8,000 to 8,500 new units, for a minimum of about 15,000 new units over the 6th and 7th Cycles combined, covering the years 2023 to 2039. This does not include any additional “buffer” for the two RHNA cycles, nor additional capacity for the 8th Cycle RHNA, which will begin in 2039 before the General Plan horizon year of 2040.

If the City does not designate adequate residential sites to meet the future RHNAs as part of the General Plan Update, the next Housing Element, eight years from now, will need to revisit the General Plan land use map and include a process to identify and change the designations on additional sites to accommodate more future housing. The ability for each alternative to meet the 6th Cycle RHNA and future cycles are described below.

- **Alternative A**, which anticipates **11,810 units**, meets the 6th Cycle RHNA plus a buffer and would likely accommodate about 1,188 units of capacity remaining for future RHNAs beyond 2031. However, if future RHNAs are similar to the 6th cycle RHNA, Alternative A isn’t enough to accommodate the full amount, and the City would have to complete a substantial update to the Land Use, Circulation, and Housing Elements in order to account for future RHNA cycles, including the 7th Cycle, which is due for certification in January 2031.
- **Alternative B**, which anticipates **16,070 units**, could likely accommodate the City’s 6th and 7th Cycle RHNAs and at least a small buffer, and would allow for Land Use and Circulation Elements that align more closely with the desired life cycle of General Plan 2040, assuming future allocations follow current trends.

- **Alternative C**, which anticipates **21,080 units**, would provide the most assurance in terms of meeting future RHNA cycles and buffers within the Study Areas and corresponding with the projected life cycle of General Plan 2040.

JOBS-HOUSING BALANCE

Jobs-housing balance is a measure of how well the local economy provides jobs for the local labor force. An adequate balance of housing and jobs can benefit the city’s economy, environment, and the resident’s quality of life. Although this topic is often described as “jobs-housing” balance, comparing the number of jobs to the number of residents is a more direct comparison of individuals, rather than comparing people to homes. The jobs-employed residents ratio is calculated by dividing the number of jobs in the community by the number of employed residents in the same area. It must take into account the fact that many residents are children, seniors, students, or otherwise not part of the workforce. A high number of jobs relative to residents typically indicates that workers are commuting into the community. A low number of jobs and high number of residents typically indicates that workers are commuting out of the community for work. When the number of employed residents is significantly higher than the number of jobs in the city, it can lead to increased traffic congestion as workers commute either in or out, which in turn creates increased air pollutant emissions, increased noise, and increased GHG emissions. It should be noted that the ratio of jobs to employed residents indicates a numerical match, not a qualitative match in job type vs. resident skills and abilities.

An ideal jobs-to-employed residents ratio for a city like San Mateo would be 1.0, which indicates that there is a job in the community for every employed resident. It is important to note, even with an ideal jobs-to-employed residents ratio of 1.0, that many residents will continue to commute outside of San Mateo while workers that do not reside in San Mateo will continue to commute in. As shown in Figure 21, “Where People Live vs. Work,” as of 2018, approximately 49,000 people that worked in San Mateo lived outside of the city and approximately 49,000

San Mateo residents commuted outside of the City for work, and only approximately 7,000 both live and work in San Mateo. Since 2020, the Covid pandemic has changed commute patterns in the Bay Area for those workers who are able to work remotely. However, comparable US Census data to what is displayed in Figure 21 is not yet available for 2020 or 2021.

Although the City cannot control whether jobs within San Mateo are filled by residents, striving for a jobs-to-employed residents ratio of 1.0 increases the opportunity for employed residents to find a job in San Mateo.

Table 7 shows the jobs-to-employed residents ratio for the three land use alternatives. Based on existing conditions plus net new employees and new population projected through 2040 under each alternative:

- **Alternative A** would result in a slightly higher jobs-employed residents balance when compared to the baseline year of 2018 (this is the most recent year for which reliable data is available; in 2020 and 2021 these numbers have been affected by the Covid pandemic). This implies that San Mateo would have slightly more jobs than employed residents.
- **Alternatives B and C** would result in a slightly lower jobs-employed residents balance when compared to the baseline year of 2018. However, Alternative B would still result in a jobs-employed residents ratio over 1.0. Alternative C would result in a jobs-employed residents ratio of .95.

All three alternatives are very close together when considering the total number of existing plus net new jobs and employed residents, and because this is a numerical ratio rather than an exact match of workers to jobs. As describe previously, in- and out-commuting will still continue under any alternative even with at an ideal jobs-to-employed residents of 1.0.

Figure 21. Where People Live vs. Work

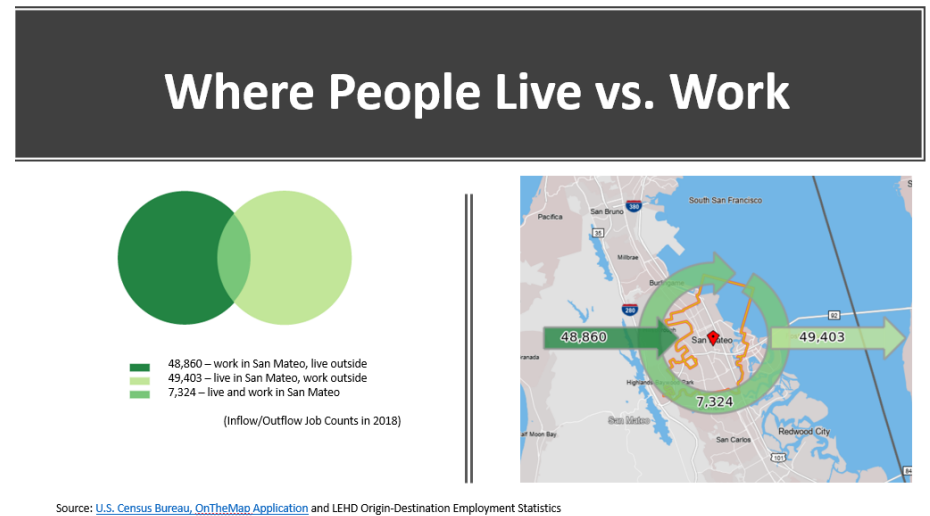


Table 7 Jobs to Employed Residents Ratio

	Existing (2018)	Alternative A (Net New + Existing)	Alternative B (Net New + Existing)	Alternative C (Net New + Existing)
Population	104,500	133,998	144,759	158,007
Jobs	52,800	68,230	68,230	67,790
Est. Employed residents (0.45)	49,500	60,300	65,150	71,100
<i>Jobs-to-Employed Residents Ratio</i>	1.07	1.13	1.05	.95

Source: PlaceWorks, 2021

HISTORIC RESOURCES

The City of San Mateo's 1989 Historic Building Survey includes information regarding a variety of historic resources as well as contributors to a historic district. The Historic Building Survey identified approximately 200 historically significant structures as shown on Figure 22. Of the 200 structures, approximately 37 structures were eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.¹ To establish the historic significance of buildings, the Survey utilized the evaluation standards adopted by the California State Office of Historic Preservation. The Historic Building Survey focused on areas east of El Camino Real because this is where the oldest neighborhoods mostly occurred.² Since over 30 years have passed since the last Historic Building Survey, it is possible that there are new structures that could be considered historic per federal and State guidelines.

Five buildings in the City are listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Ernest Coxhead House on the East of Santa Inez, De Sabla Teahouse and Tea Garden on De Sabla Avenue, Hotel Saint Matthew on Second Avenue, National Bank of San Mateo on B Street, and the US Post Office on South Ellsworth Street.³ Thirteen historic resources, including Central Park and the Jepson Laurel Tree (the oldest and largest known Laurel in California), are listed on the California State Register. The City of San Mateo's 1989 Historic Building Survey includes information regarding a variety of historic resources as well as contributors to a historic district. The Historic Building Survey identified approximately 200 historically significant structures. Of the 200

structures, approximately 37 structures are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.⁴ To establish the historic significance of buildings, the Survey utilized the evaluation standards adopted by the California State Office of Historic Preservation. The Historic Building Survey focused on areas east of El Camino Real.⁵

The Historic Building Survey also identified two historic districts, the Downtown Historic District and the Glazenwood Historic District. In addition to any individual buildings, common areas, or historic sites within these Districts, the relationship of buildings to each other, setbacks, fence patterns, views, driveways and walkways, and street trees and other landscaping together establish the character of the District.⁶

Historic resources in the Downtown Historic District, which is within Study Area 4, are mainly concentrated along East Third Avenue and South B Street, though historic structures exist throughout the Downtown.⁷ Historic structures in the Downtown Historic District were built before 1900 to the late 1930s.⁸ The Glazenwood Historic District, which is immediately south of Study Area 4 but is not within any of the study areas, is a residential area that includes 1920's Spanish Colonial Revival homes. To support the preservation of these historic resources, the City has codified protection of historic buildings in the General Plan and Zoning Code.

¹ City of San Mateo, *Historic Resources Handout*, page 1.

² San Mateo County Historical Association, *City of San Mateo Historic Building Survey*, 1989, page 4.

³ City of San Mateo, *Vision 2030 General Plan*, pages VI-8.

⁴ City of San Mateo, *Historic Resources Handout*, page 1.

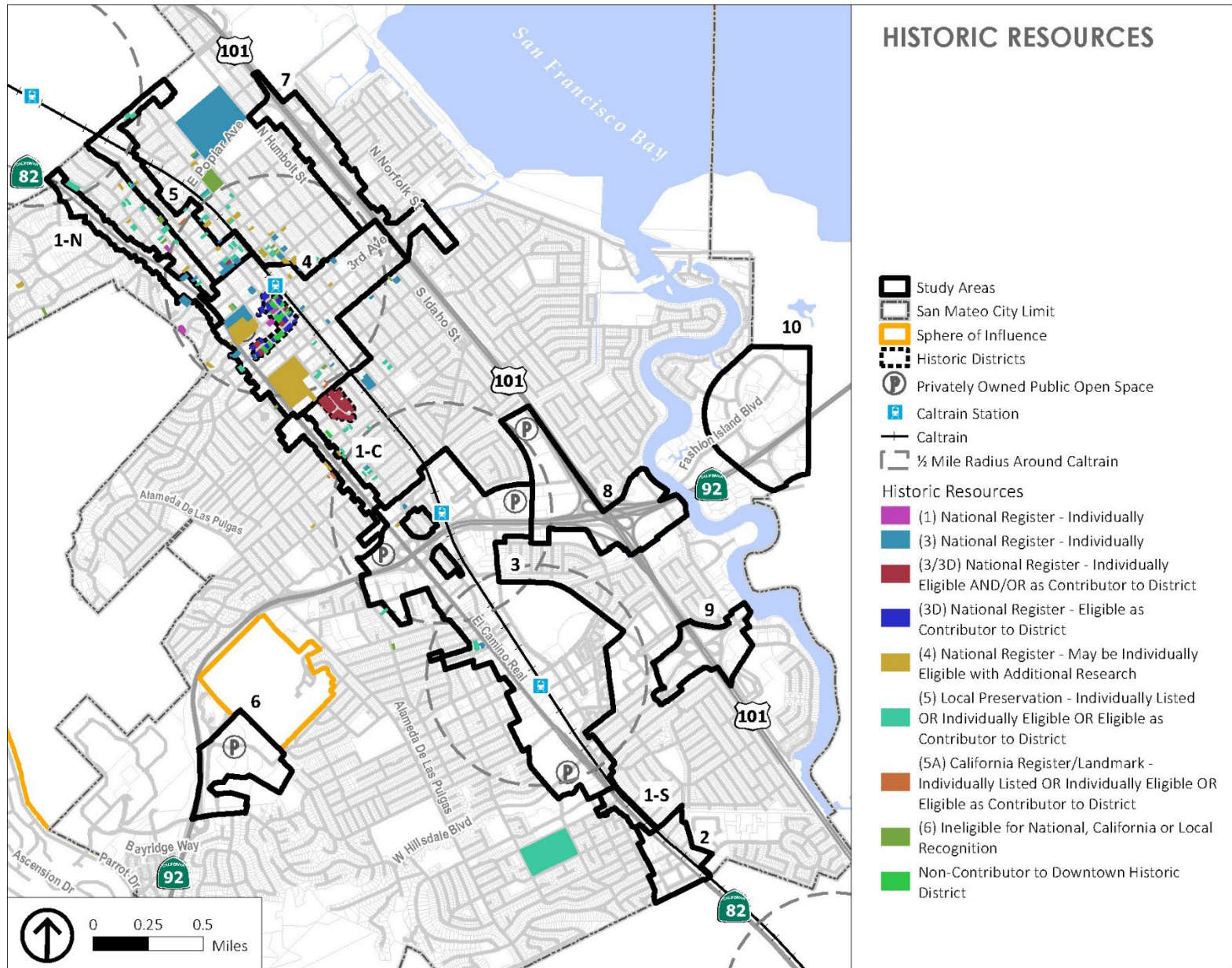
⁵ San Mateo County Historical Association, *City of San Mateo Historic Building Survey*, 1989, page 4.

⁶ <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/treatment-guidelines-2017.pdf>

⁷ San Mateo County Historical Association, *City of San Mateo Historic Building Survey*, 1989, page 19.

⁸ San Mateo County Historical Association, *City of San Mateo Historic Building Survey*, 1989, page 20.

Figure 22. Historic Resources



Within the Historic District itself, any future change would be regulated by federal, State, and local codes that protect identified historic resources, although these regulations do not prohibit demolition or alteration of historic buildings. Impacts to the Historic District could come from change within the district or from development outside of, but adjacent to, the district. New construction replacing historic buildings could introduce incompatible site design, height and bulk, or materials and features adjacent to historic buildings. This could effect the integrity of the buildings and the Historic District as resources even if the historic buildings themselves are not changed.

Study Area 4 includes the Downtown Historic District and the highest concentration of individual historic buildings in San Mateo. **Within Study Area 4:**

- **Alternative A** includes least change Downtown. Most of Downtown is designated Mixed Use Medium, which is consistent with the existing development pattern, therefore least likely to stimulate change and likely to have the fewest impacts.
- **Alternative B** would allow the greatest change inside the Historic District. It designates the northern arm of District between Baldwin Avenue, 2nd Avenue, Ellsworth Avenue, and B Street as Mixed-Use High. The ability to build larger and taller buildings as compared to the other two alternatives could motivate property owners to go through the difficult, expensive, and risky process of proposing to redevelop on or next to an historic property. Alternative B would be the most likely to impact historic resources within the Downtown Historic District.
- **Alternative C** designates the entire Historic District Mixed Use Medium, so properties within the District would be less likely to be directly impacted than under Alternative B. However, Alternative C allows Mixed Use High throughout much of Downtown, including properties immediately next to the Historic District. Alternative C would be most likely to result in

development incompatible with the existing historic fabric surrounding the Downtown Historic District.

Central Park is a State-listed historic resource also located within Study Area 4. The three alternatives are substantially similar in the land use designations around Central Park, with the exception of the buildings to the north across 5th Avenue. These parcels are designated Mixed Use Medium in Alternative A, a mix of Mixed-Use Medium and Mixed-Use High in Alt B, and Mixed-Use High in Alternative C. Alternative C would represent the greatest likelihood of change to the existing urban fabric on the north side of Central Park. However, this change would not be likely to threaten the eligibility of Central Park to remain on the California State Register.

The Historic Building Survey identifies scattered historic resources in **Study Area 5** along San Mateo Drive and North Ellsworth Avenue, especially in the southern end of the study area closest to Downtown. These are designated Residential Medium in Alternatives A and B and a mix of Residential Medium, Residential High, and Mixed-Use High in Alternative C. In Study Area 5, **Alternative C** would be most likely to lead to redevelopment on or next to the site of existing historic buildings.

Farther south in **Study Area 3**, the Historic Building Survey identifies a cluster of historic buildings on the northwest corner of 25th Avenue and El Camino Real (Cobani, Wes Liquors, and the Goodwill). These are designated as Mixed-Use Low in Alternative A and as Mixed-Use Medium in both Alternatives B and C. Because they would allow more intensive new development, both Alternatives B and C are more likely than A to impact the historic buildings in Study Area 3.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Housing Element currently underway will be required to include a variety of policies and programs to demonstrate that the City can provide housing for all income levels. In addition, the General Plan Update could consider various policies and actions related to urban form, historic resources, and jobs-housing balance. Examples include:

- Considering natural topography and the design of new development.
- Requirements for preservation or replacement of mature trees and robust new landscaping as part of new development.
- Pursuing new sources of funding for historic preservation.
- Creating incentives to preserve historic and cultural resources.
- Creating objective design standards for development within historic districts or adjacent to historic structures and/or culturally important sites to maintain the historic character of these resources.
- Encouraging uses that provide job opportunities for City residents.